

IN BED WITH HISTORY

Thomas Wallace House in Petersburg opens as Airbnb.

IF SPENDING THE NIGHT AT A HISTORIC mansion is on your bucket list, look no further than the Thomas Wallace House in Petersburg. The Italianate-style home hosted the famous last meeting between President Abraham Lincoln and Gen. Ulysses Grant just days before the end of the Civil War. Last fall, its doors were opened to the public for the first time in decades. In addition to being part of Petersburg's historic tour, it serves as an events venue—and as a lodging that you can book through Airbnb.

"The building's historical gravitas lends itself to those who are interested in making history themselves," says Alan M. Blankenstein of the Solution Tree and HOPE Foundation, who represents the current owner.

Built in 1855 for Thomas Wallace, a wealthy local lawyer and merchant, the two-story house served as Grant's headquarters in Petersburg. On April 3, 1865, the day after Petersburg fell,

the general met with the president inside the vestibule to discuss the impending conclusion of the war and plans for Reconstruction. In 1975, the home was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

After an extensive renovation, which included the addition of two extra bathrooms on the top floor, the Thomas Wallace House welcomed its first overnight guests last July. "We have upgraded where necessary," Blankenstein says. "Everybody likes the idea of sleeping in a bed that Lincoln slept in, but nobody wants to do it. So we put new, high quality beds in there." But the restorers kept the ceilings, chandeliers, fireplaces, and crown molding intact, as well as the exposed tin ceilings upstairs.

Since it opened as an Airbnb, the house has hosted guests from more than 20 states and tourists from as far away as South Africa.

HistoricPetersburg.org —By Markus Schmidt



> BOOKS

Holly Banks Full of Angst

By Julie Valerie

LAKE UNION PUBLISHING, \$14.95

Holly Banks and her family have moved to Village of Primm, famed for its Pinterest-perfect homes and excellent schools. Struggling to unpack, calm kindergarten anxiety, and avoid the hyper-demanding PTA president—plus deal with her possibly straying husband and unpredictable mother—Holly flubs her way through the first week of school. Virginia author Julie Valerie's over-the-top farce involves school buses, topiaries, money laundering, pies, spies ... and the realization that there's no such thing as a perfect mom. Any woman intimidated by the social media perfection of her peers will find something to identify with in this wry look at modern motherhood. —By Mindy Kinsey



SOLVING A MYSTERY

"Ghost" ships in the Nansemond River.

A GROUP OF EXPERTS from Florida are studying a dozen derelict ships in the Nansemond River in Suffolk. The ships were found two years ago when a local historian, Kermit Hobbs, flew a drone over the site near the bridge on North Main Street during low tide. "I noticed rows of what looked like little wooden posts sticking up from the mud flat at the edge of the river nearby," Hobbs says. To his surprise, he spotted the outlines of at least six boats. He posted the drone videos on YouTube under the title "Nansemond River Ghost Fleet," hoping that someone who could offer more information would see it.

In October 2019, a group of archaeologists from St. Augustine, Florida, spent two weeks mapping the location, where they found the remains of at least six more vessels common to the Chesapeake Bay, all dating back to the era between the Civil War and World War I. The archeologists took small samples of wood and other materials to study, hoping to learn the story behind these vessels. They plan to return this year and use laser measurements to build a 3D electronic image of the entire site. —By M.S.



UP AGAINST THE ROPES

A new adventure park brings the outdoors in all year 'round.

CLIMBERS AND OBSTACLE-COURSE enthusiasts, shake off the cold and head to Summit Ropes, a new 16,500-square-foot adventure park that claims to be the largest

indoor ropes course in the country. Inspired by Utah's most famous national park, the colors and rock simulations inside the multi-level facility bring a piece of Zion to Lou-

doun County. Various courses let you clamber up the 86-foot Via Ferrata wall or through vertical obstacles like the DNA Bridge, Twisted Net, or Leap of Faith. "Summit Ropes requires people to make decisions, consider their path, plan how high they are going, and contemplate how much they are going to challenge themselves," says Dan Kasabian, an avid climber who opened the park last year in Sterling with Amy Stuart. "We have climbed some of the highest peaks in the United States ... and with the creation of Summit Ropes, we hope to bring these types of adventures to our community and to our children." *SummitRopes.com —By M.S.*

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